DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 214 747 RC 013 305

AUTHOR Vachon, Claude
TITLE Regional, Rural Home ABE Program Spells Impact.
PUB DATE 4 Apr 81
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Basic Education; Agency Cooperation; *County Programs; *Delivery Systems; *Functional Literacy; *Home Programs; Individual Instruction; Reading Programs; Regional Programs; *Rural Areas; Student Recruitment; Tutors
IDENTIFIERS Literacy Volunteers Inc; *Maine (Franklin County)

ABSTRACT

Maine's State Division of Adult Education began setting up a regionalized Adult Basic Education (ABE) program in rural Franklin county in 1974 to serve the area's functional illiterates. Located in the building housing the Franklin County Community Action Program (CAP), linkages were developed with a large number of agencies; initially the 10 CAP outreach workers were the ABE recruiters. Literacy Volunteers of Franklin County became the nucleus of ABE's teaching staff. Later the ABE program was asked to also provide GED instruction for the area's hard core dropouts. County Commissioners and CETA began to provide financial resources in the form of revenue sharing monies and CETA recruiter-tutor positions. Last year 209 persons were reached. At May's recognition day 27 diplomas were granted; reading students also received certificates based on teacher contact hours. The greatest impact is not in grades but is in changed behavior, growth in self confidence, and improved self image. For such a program to work, it must: seek out hard core non-readers or drop outs; be brought to participants on an individualized basis; provide in-home instruction in isolated communities; and develop strong linkages with human services agencies and institutions at all levels. (BRR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED214747

REGIONAL, RURAL HOME ABE PROGRAM SPELLS IMPACT

by Claude Vachon, Director

Franklin County ABE Program
Farmington, Maine

April 4, 1981

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

✓ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Claude Vachon

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

RC 01 3305

RC 013805

4/4/81

"Regional, Rural Home ABE Program" Spells Impact

by Claude Vachon, Director
Franklin County ABE Program, ~~East Wilton~~ Farmington, Maine 04938
P.O. Box 643 tel 207-778-3460

The title of this workshop reads: Regional Rural, Home ABE Program Spells Impact.

It is about an ABE Program in Franklin County. If you'll allow me I would like to indulge into a hobby popular since last year: going back to our roots. This trek into the past will help explain how the program developed. You have probably seen over your T.V. screens Bell Telephone's publicity about the possibility of communicating via glass fiber cables. Hundreds of messages could be transmitted simultaneously. Over the last two decades the means of communication have improved throughout the world. Educational institutions have multiplied even in undeveloped countries. Yet an Unesco report revealed that functional illiteracy was simultaneously increasing.[1] Most alarming of all, the study indicated that some of the most technically developed societies were the ones losing ground faster than they could deal with the problem; the United States may be winning this infamous award. What hurts the most is the realization that minuscule Cuba which had one of the highest rates of illiteracy in the world a few years ago, has succeeded, so we were told, in eradicating illiteracy within a decade without the financial and technical resources we have available in this country. The differences seem to be determination, commitment, and a willingness to solve the problem.

Almost twenty years ago, Kennedy's, "New Society" and Johnson's "War on Poverty", developed a common plan of attack. Poverty, planners assumed, was linked directly to illiteracy: lack of basic skills, The Adult Education Act of 1966 and its massive appropriations for Adult Basic Education was to remedy the problem, the government thought. Like other states, Maine added Adult Basic Education components to its developing Adult Education Networks. As was the custom with Adult Ed. classes were held at night once the schools had emptied themselves of their day school population. By the early 1970's a few Maine ABE programs began reaching out to the adults who were too uncomfortable to attend classes in the school environment which had spelled failure for them. This marked the beginning of home classes. Shortly afterwards, learning centers sprung up in store fronts and other facilities, (in the areas of the city where the students felt at ease i.e., closer to his/her culture.)

Then in November, 1974 the National Advisory Council for Adult Education published the results of its study of ABE program reports over the last 10 years. The title of the report was "A Target Population in Adult Education"[2]. The report indicated that indeed ABE monies had been well used. Thousands of persons had been served nationally over the last 10 years. But a closer study of statistics revealed that the persons reached were self motivated persons ie., adults who read at the intermediate level (5-8 grades). The mass of hard core illiterates had only been scratched.

To me, that report was a call to reevaluate the priorities of our program. The Home COOP Learning Center where I worked at that time had developed an alternative to the diploma programs. We were offering life coping skill courses but without emphasizing basic literacy skills (3 r's). The staff, in my mind, was planning a reorientation of priorities in that time for the fall of the year.

Simultaneously the Maine State Department of Educational and Cultural Services read the signs of the times with the Commission's report in mind, reorganized Division of Adult and Vocational Education took a fresh look at the map of Maine (Maine is a predominantly rural state, the largest in New England.) Prosperous ABE programs existed in the major cities of the state: Portland, Lewiston, Saco-Biddeford, Van Buren and Presque Isle. Yet large areas remained in the state where no ABE services were available. These were the poorest counties as well. Unfortunately, the ABE Commission's desire to reach the hard core was not supported by matching appropriations. Therefore, the division attempted to solve the problem by regionalizing the delivery of ABE service. Washington County, the easternmost,and most economically deprived, was the Division's first concern. A regional approach had this particular problem: that of sponsorship of a program which geographically would cover several school districts and deal with officials with ten to twenty small communities. As things turned out, each regional program developed in its own unique way.

I've been asked to share with you the directions taken by the Franklin County Adult Basic Education Program. I'm most happy to share our experience with you because we all will have to reassess our situation. From what I gather, the new ABE guidelines will emphasize services to the hard to reach functional illiterates. I find this conference a unique opportunity to share our experience so that we'll return home more committed to help the neediest.

As we proceed, I will use a chronological format. Past history can tell us more about what to expect in the future; so it can be used as a prescription. Therefore, as we follow the evolution of the Franklin County ABE Program we'll see the problems faced, the steps taken and the ensuing results.

From the eastern most part of the state of Maine, the Division of Adult Education turned to the west of the state, Franklin County. Like Washington County, Franklin County also boasted more trees than people. But here, the population was heavier, the communities more numerous, though very rural and huddled around shoe shops and wood mills. Forest and mountains and lakes are the base of the area's economy; very seasonal with summer tourists and winter sports; very much at the mercy of the ups and downs of leather and wood product industries, the latter dependant on the surrounding forests and lumbering operations.

A quick look at the map of Franklin County and the adjoining northern section of Androscoggin County and related statistics, gives us an overview of the situation. Livermore Falls is thrown into the picture because, demographically, and economically, that community gravitates towards Farmington, the county seat of Franklin County.

Of the total population of people in Franklin County and adjoining areas, 15% (3,311) of the 22,202 people did not have more than 8 years of schooling. Another 13% (3,046) had less than 12 years of education.

The population is distributed in this fashion: Farmington, where a branch of the University of Maine is located, has a population of 6,000; three other towns, Wilton, Jay and Livermore Falls have approximately 4,000 people each; the rest of the population is scattered in the remaining 16 towns, and 8 plantations and townships.

In the whole area, elementary and secondary education is provided by five regional school districts as illustrated on the accompanying map.

In 1974, the Division of Adult Education funded an informal survey of needs for literacy services in the county. The study based on interviews with low income people, town, county and school officials, was conducted by United Low Income. The organization's report revealed that in view of the educational, economic and living conditions prevalent in the county, the whole area definitely needed basic literacy and life coping skills services. The survey's recommendations were supported by deliverers of social services in the area, by the school administrations, the officials of county and municipal governments of the region.

Literacy services had been offered intermittently in Franklin County. The Program of Basic Studies and Veterans Early Education Program offered remedial courses and preparation for the GED. The university's reading department occasionally arranged tutoring of adults by its students. Of the area's five school systems, Livermore Falls alone offered a diploma program and SAD 9 in Farmington, a GED preparation course.

The Community Action Council sporadically helped drop outs towards the GED, through its Neighborhood Youth Corps program. In 1973, a counselor in this program, contacted Literacy Volunteers of the Adjoining county for help with the youth they were reaching. Four volunteers were trained to teach reading. That was the extent of the GED and literacy services offered in the area. The crying needs were there. This situation called for the establishment of a viable ABE program with guarantees of continous funding. No institution was tackling the problem. Thus the time and place were ripe for the State Division of Adult Education to make it's first step in setting up a regionalized ABE service in Franklin County which would serve the areas funcitonal illiterates.

Several agencies were considered as possible providers of ABE services: the University, SAD 9 (one of the school systems) and the Franklin County Community Action Council. The Kenneth Foster Regional Vocational Technical Center of SAD 9 appeared to be the ideal vehicle. Kenneth Foster was a regional school. It received students from the other 4 school systems of the area, including SAD 36 (Livermore Falls) of adjoining Androscoggin County. Ideally an ABE program could radiate back services to the communities of the 5 school districts. SAD 9 and Kenneth Foster agreed to sponsor the regional program, providing no local funds would be involved. I was employed to pre plan and establish the program. The superintendents's office would handle fiscal matters. The director of Kenneth Foster would provide general supervision to the program, now called Franklin County Adult Basic Education Program.

From the very beginning the program committed itself to the following principles: it would concentrate on recruiting hard core functional illiterates; the program would be regional; it would instruct on a one to one tutoring mode as much as possible and use small groups whereever feasible; teaching would be individualized and would use part time paid teachers.

One logistic problem had to be solved early. A base of operation had to be found. No office space was available in the schools. Furthermore, we knew that the participants we were seeking were reluctant to set foot in buildings which reminded them of failure. Store fronts were out of the question; rent would be prohibitive. Kenneth Foster's Director had a brilliant idea; the old school house rented by the Franklin County Community Action Program in East Wilton (referred to as CAP henceforward) would be an ideal location. The CAP was an umbrella organization sponsoring some 14 human services agencies which served county wide the same population as we were trying to reach; Housing, Winterization, Energy Conservation Center, Androscoggin Valley Planning Commission, Head Start, Day Care Centers and Day Care Homes, Family Planning, Women, Infants and Children program, CETA Intake Center, Work Experience, and SPEDY program, Rural Health Practice and its five clinics in the region, Androscoggin Home Health Services. Furthermore, all these agencies were served by 10 Outreach Workers who fanned out into the region to provide referral and advocacy services.

Because we were housed at the nerve center of the CAP, we learned how to develop linkages with a large number of the agencies. The cooperation became a key element of our recruitment. It eventually led to the expansion of the program. Four years ago I had attempted to work with another Community Council in the state. In no way would they cooperate. The local political climate had cast the organization I worked for and that particular CAP in an adversary role. The opposite of cooperation ensued. The secret of cooperation I now learned was a spirit of openess and personal contact with staff personnel of these agencies. The program has also forged many links with other organizations chief among which were Literacy Volunteers and the CETA office.

A familiar problem the program faced was limited funding. Dollars had to be stretched. Besides planning and implementing the program, I was also to serve as part time teacher and coordinator. Only $3,800.00 had been budgeted that first year for part time tutors. We also had to train these paraprofessionals in the skills of teaching the 3 r's. Providentially, a link with another organization provided a solution for the need of tutors and for their training - my former contacts with Literacy Volunteers in Maine; but also recruiting benefits.

In 1970 I was put in a situation where I had to teach basic reading to a teenager. I was at a loss. My Greek and Latin background were useless. Fortunately I read in the local newspaper of a Reading Workshop presented by Literacy Volunteers. The organizations 18 hour workshop has helped me very much over the years in terms of literacy training, contacts and friendships, especially at this particular moment when I was getting the program on its feet.

It was then natural for me to link up with Literacy Volunteers in the Farmington area. Over the last two years their number had grown to twelve and dwindled back down to three or four active members. The local group had no formal leadership or organization. I joined with them, recruited volunteers, helped train 12 new tutors, and volunteered to coordinate the matching of tutors and students and combined activites for the two organizations. This cooperation has guaranteed sound basic training for tutors, both paid and volunteering. On an average twenty five volunteers a year taught one student two hours a week. This represents the equivalent of one full time teacher a year.

This last year Literacy Volunteers of Franklin County has formally organized as a full fledged affiliate with its chairman and executive committee. I continue coordinating both programs. A unique cooperating relationship has developed between Literacy Volunteers and the ABE program of Franklin County. We share training of volunteers and ABE staff; use of library materials, publicity, ongoing staff development and specifically recruiting of volunteers and students; matching of students.

Simultaneously with the first volunteer tutor training workshop, the program tackled it's major task; recruiting hard core functional illiterates. Initially our most effective tool was the group of Outreach Workers at the CAP. We shared with them our goals and activities and made suggestions on how they could serve as a third party to refer the clients they were helping to the ABE program. They would explain that our services were free and confidential; that students would have theri very own tutor who would teach them in the privacy of their home or wherever they felt most comfortable; that the teacher would start wherever they were at, build on that and all the other life long learning experiences they had acquired since they had left school.

In early June of 1975 I was tutoring a person in the Wilton-Farmington area. By mid July one literacy Volunteer now employed as a part time ABE tutor, was teaching 10 persons from her home in Strong. Meanwhile 3 other volunteers taught as many students. The student count by the end of the summer was 25.

By fall, we had run another Liveracy Volunteer Tutor Training Workshop at the college. Referrals kept coming in from towns further north in the County. Another Literacy Volunteer was employed in Kingfield. By the end of the year, we were tutoring 80 persons. The staff was made up of myself, 4 part time tutors, and 33 volunteers.

But another request was made of the program. Outreach Workers, work experience counselors and Vocational Rehab. inquired if we would assist people out in the rural areas to get their high school equivalency diploma. Were these hare core illiterates? Some were not illiterates but were hard core drop outs. They would not return to any school environment. Several lacked transportation or were tied down with small children. The equivalency diploma held for them the promise of a chance at further schooling, vocational training, or a better job. The regional high school was willing to set up a GED preparation class at night but not with less than 10 participants. The school was not flexible enough to meet the needs of the students in terms of teaching time and location.

The ABE program's delivery system was ideally organized to meet the needs of these students. We offered to step in and fill the GED gaps providing the program did not expend more than 20% of its fiscal effort on the activity. The format would be a tutoring mode preceded by diagnosis and prescription of a plan of study. This service became another recruitment tool. We recruited more reading students since a large number of so called GED candidates read only at the intermediate level.

By the end of February 1976 our experience had shown that it was possible to literally dig out potential participants from the woods. The program showed, as already evidenced by the 1970 census, that they were present in large numbers. We showed, contrary to common belief, that they were willing to make use of remedial literacy services to help themselves, once they found out the services were available and that they were treated respectfully in the process. We felt that full time recruiter tutors were warranted. However, ABE funds remained limited. At this time, our links with the CAP led us to the CETA Administration. Initial applications for a position were not approved. But during that time we learned the ropes and concentrated on publicizing the program and the people it served: the neediest in the county. Five area newspapers carried articles describing the programs' delivery system. Participants were interviewed on radio talk shows and twice a year we mailed a progress report letter to every selectman and school board member throughout the area's 5 school systems and 22 towns. All superintendents, principals, guidance counselors, county commissioners and local state legislators were also kept abreast of developments. This publicity paid off.

When new CETA monies were made available, the cover letter accompanying our request reminded the County Commissioners that a recruiter tutor position was the best investment they could make for the county. Persons dependent on public assistance would improve their self image, grow in confidence and acquire basic literacy skills or the equivalency diploma which eventually would make them productive citizens of the county. The County Commissioners and the CETA office thus became one of the programs best financial resources in recruiting hard to reach non readers.

The commissioners were so satisfied with the effectiveness of the program that the following year they granted ABE county revenue sharing monies to continue the recruiter tutor position. That same year they funded 3 CETA recruiter tutor positions and 4 this current year, including a curriculum developer. Indirectly, these full time positions allowed us to consolidate our delivery services in the field, in terms of new communities served, of people taught and of the visibility of the program. As a result, the area's five schools may soon participate in the program by underwriting part of its budget on a pro rated basis. This will guarantee fiscal stability and local ownership of the program by the 5 school districts through the Administrative Board of Kenneth Foster Regional Vocational Center under the direct responsibility of SAD 9's School Board.

Another facet of the program, which has helped establish it on a good base, has been its stress on staff development. The core of the training is Literacy Volunteers' tutor training workshop; the 18 hour Basic Reading Workshop, and the 12 hour workshop on English as Second Language. Besides this training, tutors must participate in ongoing staff development, either local or regional. Topics we have found essential are:

recruiting; interviewing and diagnosing the student; counseling, the listening and agency referral kind; values clarification; community education, swapshops, university courses relevant to the tutor's work; and the London procedure to diagnose adult learning difficulties. This year we are concentrating on self assessment as a tool to supervise instruction and to plan further staff development activities.

The core of the program really is its staff. Tutors are chosen both for their ability to deal compassionately with the program participants and their willingness to develop their native teaching skills. Most of them have a B.A. or a B.S. with some limited day school experience, but that is not a requirement. The difficulty we have, is that of staff turnover due to lack of funds to carry on the CETA positions. All in all, the staff has been generous, dedicated, and effective. They have developed into a unique type of adult instructor which I like to call, "circuit riding recruiter tutors." Many hours are passed in their car, seeking out students, or driving to their tutoring appointment on the wooded back roads of Franklin County's small communities, calling on shoe shops, and wood turning mills, etc. On an average they covered 7,000 miles each, last year. This represents a lot of wear and tear. On the rear seat of their car their tool chest is their cardboard box of teaching materials. On the average they teach 20 students each and maintain irregular contact with 10-15 other students. Without them the unreachable could not be reached.

We are often asked: who are the students?

Thanks to the Program's recruiting efforts, we reached 209 persons last year. Here are some facts which describe the people we serve. These 209 persons were distributed over 25 towns covering 5 school systems. Their ages vary from 16-72: 34% between the ages of 15-24; 48% between 25-44; and 22%, 45-72. Two thirds were women. 43% were unemployed. 36% received some form of public assistance. The majority joined the program to either improve their basic skills so as to work towards the diploma and a better job. The GED participants wanted the diploma as a help towards further training and possible job improvement.

From vital statistics we noticed that 3 had never completed 1st grade; 17 or 9% completed the 5th grade only; 37% had quit between 6th and 8th grade; approximately half had dropped out during high school (104). Beginning reading levels idicated that 17 could not read at all; 34% read below the 5.5 grade level; 37% (59) possessed skills at the intermediate level. The majority of these wanted to study for the GED, but we had to upgrade their comprehension skills before classifying them in that group. 24% (43) of the GED independent study group read at the 8th grade level. The remaining 10% (18) read at the high school level; mostly at the 9th & 10th grade levels. Percentage wise, 74% (155) were in the reading program. One third (67) of the participants were hardest hard core illiterates (-4gr.) 26% (54) studied for their equivalency.

At this point people ask - what about results? At the annual recognition day last May 27 diplomas were granted. 52 persons received their certificate since the beginning of the program. But the reading students also received certificates based on the number of contact hours with their teacher. At the rate of two one hour meetings a week, participants on the average improve their reading one grade level a year; some 3 grades; others, less.

However, the greatest impact of the program cannot be measured in terms of grades. Results also take the form of changed behavior. This spells growth in self confidence, in improved self image, this means people who begin to take a hold on the direction of their life. How can we measure the indirect effect in a community where 36 participants had 114 children among them, 51 of these in school? Now these are families where school has been bad mouthed, where traditionally parents dropped out of school.

There was Carl, the mechanic, who ignored repair slips for the fleet of trucks he maintained. Up to now, He had to lift the hood of the truck and find the trouble himself. Now he reports with a broad smile, "Now I take the order, it takes a little time, but I can read it on my own."

There was Alvin, a 34 year old handicapped, who ran away from people like a scared rabbit. Now he talks with his head high and reaches out to shake hands with people.

Then there was retiring Arthur. He has a daytime job at the shoe shop. In the evening he became an Amway Salesman. A year later he still moonlighted, but as a recruiter trainer and supervisor of other salesmen.

The stories can be multiplied for GED participants. Some returned to the day school for post secondary courses. Others studied bookkeeping, began training for LPN's. All this happened because of a flexible program which searched them out in the country side and tailored services to their needs. Now they are stepping out of their isolation, returning to their communities, holding their head a bit higher, becoming more active members of the communities, more givers than receivers, happier and more productive people.

The program has had other results.

In Adult Education we believe that instructors learn as much as the students. Both students and the program had an impact on our recruiter tutors. They've fallen in love with their work, because it's having results where it counts the most, in our community. Three of these ABE CETA trainees have decided to join the Masters Degree program in view of making a career out of Adult Education.

This brings us full circle to the traits of a successful rural ABE program.

First of all - it must be committed to seek out the hard core, non reader, the hard core dropouts who have lacked alternative means to acquire diplomas (or competency based) education.

To attain that goal, in our case, intensified urban thrust regionalization is necessary to dig out the participants where local communities and school systems lack the awareness of the need, the commitment to tackle it, and the expertise to make it go.

To reach the hard core, the program must be brought to the participant. Instruction must be individualized on a one to one basis, and buttressed with informal counseling, the listening and supportive kind.

In a regional program, home instruction is probably possible only with a combination of circuit riding recruiter tutors and part time tutors working out of their home (or other location) in isolated communities. This unique breed of instructor must be chosen for his/her compassion for other people and supported by on going professional development.

Finally, the whole delivery system can't survive without strong linkages with human services agencies and institutions at the local, district, and county levels; agencies who are in contact with and serve in other capacities the hard core functional illiterates and dropouts who need to be sought out.

But these linkages will bear results fully only if they are based on trust, a spirit of cooperation, and a desire to serve the whole person. They will become fruitful only if they are based on the conviction that even in the hardest "hard core," a spark can be struck, if only he/she will be touched with care.

1) Boyer, Ernest. "Remarks of Education Commissioner Boyer on International Literacy Day," Adult and Continuing Education Today Vol. VIII, Numbers 19 & 20, 1978 Lester A. Barrer, October 2, 1978, pp. 85-86.

2) A Target Population in Adult Education, Report of the National Advisory Council on Adult Education, November 1974. Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington,D.C. 20402 Stock Number 5203-00047, pp. 53, 64, 94.